

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 31, 1990 -- FIFTY-NINTH LEGISLATIVE DAY

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IN JOINT CONVENTION

GOVERNOR'S BUDGET ADDRESS

The hour having arrived set by House Joint Resolution No. 519, the Senate met with the House in Joint Convention.

The Joint Convention was called to order by Mr. Speaker Wilder, President of the Joint Convention.

On motion of Senator Darnell, the roll call of the Senate was dispensed with.

On motion of Representative Naifeh, the roll call of the House was dispensed with.

Thereupon, the Clerk of the Senate read House Joint Resolution No. 519 authorizing the Joint Convention.

Senator Darnell moved that the President appoint a Committee composed of six (6) members from the Senate and six (6) members from the House to notify the Governor that the Joint Convention is in session and awaiting his arrival, which motion prevailed.

Mr. President Wilder appointed the following committee: Senators Albright, Cohen, Ford, Lawson, Montgomery and Richardson; Representatives Burchfield, Ray Davis (Gibson), DeBerry, Jackson, Purcell and Wolfe. Representative Ray Davis was appointed to serve as Chairman of this committee.

Without objection, the Joint Convention recessed pending the arrival of the Governor.

The Joint Convention was called to order by Mr. President Wilder.

Without objection, the roll calls of the Senate and House were dispensed with.

Representative Davis announced the Governor of the State of Tennessee at the entrance of the House.

President Wilder asked the Committee to Escort the Governor to please come forward.

President Wilder introduced the Honorable Ned McWherter, Governor of the State of Tennessee.

BUDGET MESSAGE

by Governor Ned McWherter

Governor Wilder. Speaker Murray. Members of the General Assembly. To the distinguished members of the Supreme Court. To the Constitutional Officers and the members of the Public Service Commission. And to the citizens of Tennessee.

I appreciate the invitation you have extended once again to be with you today.

I am pleased to fulfill my constitutional obligation to report to the General Assembly on the budget priorities of the Executive Branch for the next year.

As a member of the Legislative Branch, I attended eighteen of these joint conventions. I recall that the budget messages were often long, and that our eyes blurred as we heard page after page of numbers.

With your indulgence, I would like to do something different today.

Prior to the legislative session, I tried to meet at the Residence with every member of the House and Senate to discuss Tennessee's revenue status and the priorities contained in this budget. The budget proposals are no secret. These proposals are accompanied by summaries of the budget to assist in understanding the various programs.

For these reasons, my goal this afternoon is to shift our focus from the numbers to the human side which those numbers represent.

It is one thing to know that the state budget will be \$8.53 billion. It is quite another to understand in human terms what the budget priorities mean for five million Tennesseans.

I can tell you that the K-12 minimum foundation program and higher education formula are fully funded and I am proud of that. But I am more proud of what that means for Bonnie Riebeen, a third grade teacher in Grundy County. Under a new program started last fall, Bonnie will have only 15 students in her class for the first time in her career.

It means we can expand the "One Room Schools" program that has proved so successful in the public housing projects in Nashville and Memphis.

And it means that Donald Whitmore of Bolivar can use our minority teachers program to study at Middle Tennessee State University.

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The budget document states that we propose to spend \$1.5 billion, an increase of 6.3 percent, for Tennessee's Medicaid program. In human terms, it means that over the last three years we have managed to hold spending increases down, while extending health care to an additional 240,000 Tennesseans. And it means for the first time, that every pregnant mother in Tennessee, and every child up to age seven, will have access to primary health care.

Last spring, this legislature joined with me in funding a program to provide more doctors for underserved areas of Tennessee. Six months later, Elisa Clark of Wayne County delivered her third baby. The first two babies were born in the car on the 60-mile trip to the doctor. The third baby was delivered safely in Waynesboro by a doctor funded under our new program.

Oland Barber of Marion County does not care what this budget contains for water lines and waste treatment. What he knows is that after 72 years of hauling water, he now for the first time can drink water from his kitchen.

None of the boys and girls at the old Spencer Youth Center cares that the proposed capital outlay program is \$163 million, down from \$230 million. But their lives, and the chance for a better future, will be directly affected when two modern development centers open this year in Davidson and Jefferson counties.

It is easy for us to forget that the people of Madison County, Hardeman County, and Sullivan County are too occupied with paying their monthly bills to know that the budget contains an additional \$800,000 to expand the hazardous waste program. What they care about deeply is that this budget will continue the clean-up of the abandoned dump sites that threaten the health of their families.

I use these examples, because I fear that the state budget has grown so large and so complicated, that we sometimes lose perspective on the number of lives it touches.

We realize that revenue shortfalls will force us to curtail current expenditures. But at the same time, do we also realize that state government still provides a quality of services never before seen in Tennessee?

Our budget discussions always use the language of numbers and percentages. But how can these numbers measure what it means to thousands of young working parents who are benefiting from the 130 extended school programs we have established in the last eighteen months?

What numbers adequately explain what our senior citizens centers mean to the lives of our elderly?

The same question can be asked about our proposal to lower the waiting list for community mental retardation services or establish more drug treatment programs for our young people.

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A press release about a billion dollar road program means nothing to the citizens of Hendersonville, or East Ridge, or Farragut, or Germantown, where the communities are choked by traffic. I doubt if many people care about press releases in places like Sam's Gap, Hampton Gulch, or Red Boiling Springs. But thanks to your help, the new roads contained in this budget will improve the quality of life for residents of these communities for generations to come.

I share these thoughts as a preface to my comments on Tennessee's present financial status. Like the majority of states, we are experiencing a shortfall in our sales tax collections.

This does not mean we are in a crisis. It means simply that we will need to curtail some expenditures in the current fiscal year.

Our state employees already have done an outstanding job in helping reduce the operating costs of several departments.

Two years ago the hotels and restaurants in all of our state parks were running a large deficit. Today, I would invite the public to visit our parks at Pickwick Landing, Montgomery Bell, Natchez Trace, Henry Horton and Fall Creek Falls. Not only will they find parks that have been cleaned up, they will find the parks are operating on a business basis and have increased their gross revenues by three quarters of a million dollars.

Our employees in the Department of Correction have helped us reduce daily costs in our prisons from \$55 to less than \$40 by adopting a new unit management operating procedure.

Employees in Hamilton and Robertson counties have helped reduce costs in the Department of Human Services by computerizing their work.

All across state government, our employees have made remarkable progress in providing the people of Tennessee the services they require at a reasonable cost.

These improvements mean that for next year we should not have to anticipate major reductions in services.

Our task, and the task of those who petition this legislature, is to know clearly the difference between "I won't" and "I can't."

The budget poses no threat to our momentum in education. Our commitments to extended health care, juvenile services and the environment remain intact. There will be no slowing down in our construction of new roads and new prisons. And there will be no reason to slow our record pace in attracting new jobs.

Contrary to what we may sometimes read, leadership does not always consist of introducing costly new programs on an annual basis.

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Leadership also means knowing what to do, how to do it and when to do it. Over time, a series of careful steps often can result in greater progress than a more dramatic approach.

I had hoped in this address to depart from the practice of giving a lengthy list of numbers and promises. My goal was a better understanding of the human issues that bring us together and define our purpose.

I close with a true story that occurred last year in Obion County. We take pride in a literacy program that has grown from 3,000 students to 40,000 in three years. Like a hundred other programs these numbers by themselves have no value.

But at a graduation ceremony for literacy students in Union City, a gentleman named Alvin was asked what it meant to learn to read.

"Well," he said, "I guess it means two things. I work at Walmart and they gave me a raise."

"But there's one thing more important. When I go home at night, I can put my little girl on my lap and read her Bible stories. And for the first time in my life, I know she'll never have to be ashamed of her daddy because he can't read."

Thank you.

Mr. President Wilder relinquished the Chair to Mr. Speaker Murray, as President of the Joint Convention.

The purpose for which the Joint Convention was called having been accomplished, Mr. President Murray declared the Joint Convention dissolved.